

Dear Friend,

We come now to the final petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." This petition like the others raises several questions we must answer if we are to understand exactly what it is that our Lord Jesus is telling us our Father wants to do for us. The word translated "temptation" is either translated "trial" or "temptation." For example James 1:2 says: "Consider it all joy brothers when you encounter various trials..." Or again in 1 Peter 1:6, "...in this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in various kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold... may be proved genuine." So is Jesus telling us to ask God not to lead us into trials? That would seem odd in view of the fact that we are commanded to rejoice in trials and that trials are sent by God for a good purpose, that of purifying our faith.

The word is also used as "temptation" in the sense of being induced to do evil. That is its meaning in 1 Corinthians 7:5 where husbands and wives are commanded not to deprive one another sexually "so that Satan might not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." It is in this sense that James uses the word in 1:13-14, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Why would Jesus tell us to ask God to not do what it is impossible for God to do?

The answer to these questions is to see the connection between the two ideas expressed by the word translated "temptation." This petition is based upon the fact that God is the one who is sovereignly directing our lives. Proverbs 20:24 says, "A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?" God is the one who determines what trials come our way. So in the petition we are asking God to not bring into our lives those trials and difficulties that he knows will overwhelm us and through which we will fall into sin. We know that in every trial there is a temptation to abandon Christ and pursue sinful strategies to either escape or bear the trial. Therefore we are asking the Lord to not lead our steps into any trouble that he knows we will be too weak to bear and thus sin. We daily entrust our lives into the Lord's hands asking him to so order the circumstances of our lives in a way that he knows will not destroy us.

The second half of the petition confirms this basic understanding. Paul says to the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy to check up on them and to encourage them because he was afraid that as a result of their undergoing persecution "the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have proved useless." Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8-9, "...Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." The idea here is that the evil one, Satan sends trouble upon us for the purpose of causing us to abandon Christ, to sin. Thus to be delivered from the evil one is for God to not permit him from doing those things to us that the Lord knows will result in our sinning.

We are not asking the Lord to never let any bad thing happen to us because we know that God uses trial and difficulty and suffering for our good. Rather we are praying that God would only permit into our lives those things which he knows that we can handle. We are essentially praying back to the Lord the promise he makes to us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has

overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” At the core of this petition is the fact that we hate sinning. We know how weak we are and how prone to sin we are and so we daily ask the Lord to not lead us into any circumstance that he knows will overwhelm us, to not permit the devil to do anything to us that will drive us to despair and to turn our back on Jesus. This is our greatest fear and thus this is our prayer.

Let me finish our discussion of this petition by again noting the 1st person plural pronoun, “us”. We are not only concerned for our own spiritual safety but for the spiritual safety of all Christians. Jesus wants us to daily petition our heavenly Father that he would guard and protect our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as us. It is in this petition that we find the pattern and the motive that stands behind the prayers of Paul on behalf of the churches to which he wrote. All of his prayers are concerned with the spiritual health and vitality and protection of his “children in the faith”. So, next month as we continue our exploration of prayer we will turn our attention to Paul’s prayers in his letters.

Praying for God’s protection,

P.S. I’ll leave you with Martin Luther’s description of what this petition means:

“God tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God may so guard and preserve us that the devil, the world, and our own evil nature may not deceive us or mislead us into unbelief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, but that, although we may be so tempted, we may finally prevail and gain the victory. We pray that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all manner of evil, whether it affect body or soul, property or reputation, and that at last, when the hour of death comes, he may grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven.”